



STATEMENT
OF
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BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE, DRUG POLICY
AND HUMAN RESOURCES
“INTERRUPTING NARCO-TERRORIST THREATS ON THE HIGH SEAS:
DO WE HAVE ENOUGH WIND IN OUR SAILS?”

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2:00 pm
Washington, D.C.

Introduction

Chairman Souder, Ranking Member Cummings, and distinguished Members of the Committee: I am honored to appear before you today as the Acting United States Interdiction Coordinator. I also serve as the Acting Director of the Office of Counternarcotics Enforcement for the Department of Homeland Security.

Overview

We have achieved record levels for Transit Zone cocaine interdiction, vessel seizures, and arrests in each of the past two calendar years. Specifically, in the Transit Zone, we removed 210 metric tons of cocaine bound for the United States in 2003 and 248 metric tons in 2004. Cocaine seizures and removals in 2004 were approximately twice the seizures and removals of 1999. Those record levels of removals have occurred while our nation is fighting two wars overseas and has taken on new duties to stop terrorists from entering the United States. The credit for these achievements goes to the entire counterdrug community who is working closer together and synergistically attacking the traffickers where they are most vulnerable. Let me discuss a few of the key factors that have improved interdiction.

Interagency Coordination

First, the Department of Defense's leadership through Joint Interagency Task Force South has been key. In addition, the rest of the U.S. interagency team has invested in this Task Force which is producing great dividends. For more than 15 years the counterdrug community has worked to build this Task Force which has become a worldwide model for joint, interagency, and international cooperation. There have been many changes along the way, the most recent being the establishment of the Joint Operating Area. The Joint Operating Area has improved synergy, unity of command, and operational efficiency. Joint Interagency Task Force South now has total responsibility for the primary south-to-north drug trafficking threat vectors from South America. Establishing the Joint Operating Area makes sense, and I applaud those who made it happen.

Improved Intelligence

We have long recognized the value of actionable intelligence. For years, our ships and aircraft patrolled vast expanses of ocean, usually without the benefit of good intelligence. Today, our forces often have real-time, actionable intelligence, so they can narrow their focus and improve their probability of detection. The intelligence community, working in close concert with law enforcement investigators, has made remarkable strides towards understanding trafficking organizations, patterns, and activities. In particular, Operation Panama Express, a combined Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force – with representatives from the Departments of Justice, Homeland Security, and Defense – has become a model for interagency partnering. Panama Express-led investigations are developing intelligence leads that support more interdictions. JIATF-South has become a full partner with founding members FBI, ICE, and DEA. At the same time, interdictions are leading to the successful prosecution of both maritime transporters and higher level drug traffickers. Enhanced drug intelligence has allowed interdictions, investigations, and prosecutions to support each other like never before.

Better End-Game

In years past, when we successfully detected a smuggling vessel, we often could not stop them or find the drugs. Today, front-line interdictors have better equipment and capability. The Coast Guard's armed helicopters and over-the-horizon boat programs have dramatically improved end-game results. The French and British helicopters are also now armed, and the U.S. Navy, in conjunction with the Coast Guard, is working to arm their sea-based helicopters. We have also improved boarding tactics and equipment that increases the odds of finding drugs on fishing vessels. We do not stop with a successful interdiction. In fact, interdictions directly support new investigations and prosecutions. Under the leadership of the Justice Department, traffickers are being convicted with stiff sentences which in turn facilitates better intelligence and awareness as to how the traffickers are operating.

International Partnerships – A Team Effort

The support provided by our international partners is also critical to Transit Zone interdiction successes. JIATF South has full-time liaisons from ten countries in the hemisphere and communicates and coordinates Transit Zone operations directly with host nations operations centers. Currently, France and the United Kingdom deploy and use their surveillance aircraft, armed helicopters, and surface ships in counterdrug missions. The British NIMROD, a highly capable four-engine, long-range maritime surveillance aircraft, has been especially effective in detecting and tracking drug smuggling vessels. Our Dutch allies continue to provide strong support in the Caribbean. The Canadian government is working with the United States Southern Command and Joint Interagency Task Force South to coordinate future Canadian P-3 aircraft deployments to the Caribbean. This committed international and interagency effort is essential to Transit Zone operational success. International cooperation also has been critical in eliminating seams that traffickers once exploited. The United States now has 26 maritime bilateral agreements that have put the smugglers on the defensive. The smugglers now have less time to react to and avoid law enforcement, and we are able to board in time to find contraband and evidence to support prosecutions.

Maritime Patrol Aircraft

Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) are key to Transit Zone interdiction operations. MPA are currently the only persistent wide-area surveillance platform that can covertly detect, monitor, and track smugglers and support maritime end-game operations. In Calendar Year 2004, MPA participated in 73% of the cocaine removal events from noncommercial maritime conveyances in the Transit Zone. In the fourth quarter of last year, these figures rose to 91%. Last year we suffered from a reduction in long-range MPA capacity. Available MPA flying hours were significantly reduced due to unexpected wing corrosion in the U.S. Navy's P-3 fleet and the withdrawal of Netherlands P-3s from the Caribbean. Today the situation has improved: Customs and Border Protection P-3 hours have been funded to allow a 400 hour per month increase to Transit Zone operations; the Coast Guard has several initiatives in the President's FY '06 budget that will significantly increase C-130 hours in support of JIATF-South; the U.S. Air Force has deployed E-3s to support the Air Bridge Denial program, freeing CBP aircraft for maritime patrol operations; DOD is supporting British NIMROD operations in Curacao; the U.S. Navy has improved the operational on-station time of their P-3s; and DOD is working to add

Canadian Auroras to the effort. Looking forward, we need strong support from all of the force providers, and I am encouraged that they will deliver.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by saying that we must sustain the pace of these past two years and find ways to increase pressure on the traffickers. I have placed a priority on seeking alternatives that will further increase detection, monitoring, tracking, and interdiction capabilities in the Transit Zone. The USIC will continue to engage the entire interdiction community and find innovative and aggressive ways to improve our capabilities and operational effectiveness. We will support those strategies and operations that are working and keep the pressure up on all fronts. We will continue to assess our efforts and report our progress to Congress.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to answering questions from you and your Committee.